ANACOSTIA HISTORIC DISTRICT

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Anacostia Historic District

Roughly bounded by Martin Luther King Avenue on the west, Good Hope Road on the north, Fendall Street at the rear of the Frederick Douglass Home on the east, and Bangor Street at Morris Road on the south. Includes approximately 550 buildings dating from c. 1854-1930. Included in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites (1973) and listed in the National Register of Historic Places (1978).

- One of the city's first suburbs, incorporated in 1854 as Uniontown (with later expansions).
- Initially a working class community dominated by Navy Yard employees.
- Most early houses free-standing or semi-detached frame structures with front porches and Italianate detail.
- Also includes brick row houses, two business streets with early 20th century commercial buildings.
- Frederick Douglass National Historic Site (Cedar Hill; Van Hook Mansion), 14th and W Streets, SE, overlooks Uniontown. It is included in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Restoring or renovating your Anacostia home?
Call the D.C. Historic Preservation Division.
An historic preservation professional is assigned to assist you with technical information.
202-727-7360

Anacostia Community Organizations concerned with preservation and revitalization of Historic Anacostia:

The Anacostia Coordinating Council
Arrington Dixon, Chairman
The Anacostia Historical Society, founded 1977
Dianne Dale, President
The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum of the Smithsonian Institution.

SUGGESTED READING:

Fitzpatrick, Sandra & Goodwin, Maria R. *The Guide to Black Washington*, New York, N.Y.: Hippocrene Books, 1993.

Hutchinson, Louise Daniel. *The Anacostia Story: 1608-1930*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1977.

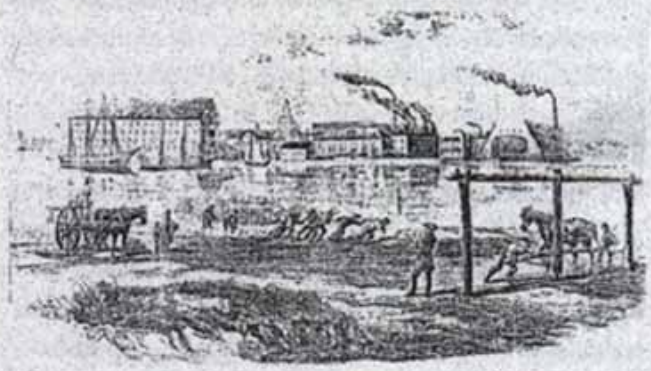
Washington History magazine. A publication of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

On the cover: ***View of Washington from Across the Eastern Branch,*** a William J. Bennett engraving, after the painting by George Cooke, 1833 (1941 reproduction). Courtesy Kiplinger Washington Collection.

"Homes for all" in the "most beautiful" neighborhood

East of the Anacostia River, in sight of the U.S. Capitol, lies an area of unusual natural beauty and rich heritage. A narrow ridge of land 200'-300' high parallels the river once known as the Eastern Branch of the Potomac. The ridge drops off abruptly to the broad bank of the Anacostia, its steep slope slashed by intersecting ravines. On the side away from the river, the ridge descends precipitously into Oxon Run, a small stream that flows into the Potomac about 3 miles below the mouth of the Anacostia. This isolates the ridge and the river bank from the countryside to the east as effectively as the Anacostia itself separates the community from the monumental center of the capital city. On a clear day the panoramic views from the Our Lady of Perpetual Help Roman Catholic Church and St. Elizabeths Hospital overlooks are breathtaking and surprising. They are rivaled only by those from the Washington Monument on the National Mall, yet they are not public views. They are the special treasure of those who live in Anacostia, glimpsed briefly by outsiders who travel along Martin Luther King Avenue or visit the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site.

Territory of Columbia, 1794 by Andrew Ellicott with Benjamin Banneker. Detail showing topography, drainage, and existing roads of Anacostia and Alexandria, with plan of Federal City. Courtesy Library of Congress



The Washington Navy Yard with shad fisheries in foreground. *Harper's Weekly*, April 26, 1864. Courtesy National Archives

Native Americans were the first inhabitants of the area, living along the river as early as 10,000 years ago. During his voyage of exploration, Captain John Smith visited the Necostin Indian village of Nacochtanke on the river bank here in 1608. He found that Nacochtanke was a large trading center, ideally situated for its purpose. Archaeologists tell us that the Necostins, called Anacostans by the English settlers, fished the river and farmed the rich river banks. They lived in small groups near their fields. The chief was housed inside a palisaded enclosure which was also the site of other important tribal activities. The Smithsonian Institution has thousands of artifacts collected from the surface in the late nineteenth century when the area was still agricultural. In 1897 a noted scholar issued an alert that "the most important ancient village-site in the whole tide-water province is situated on the Anacostia River within the city and little more than a mile from the Capitol." Today, warnings ignored, the substance of Anacostan culture remains a largely unexplored mystery, the evidence of it destroyed or buried under the Blue Plains sewage treatment plant and the runways of Bolling Air Force Base.

Colonel John Addison
Courtesy of Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.

English exploration soon led to settlement. Blew Playne, a 1000-acre tract patented to George Thompson in 1662, was the first land grant in the Washington area. It included the river frontage that is now the site of the Blue Plains plant. The adjacent tracts of St. Elizabeth and Giesborough were also patented to Thompson in 1663. The land was planted in tobacco raised by tenant farmers, indentured servants, and African slaves. Although death, marriage, and land speculation led to frequent changes of ownership, land was still held largely by a few individuals. The descendants of Colonel John Addison, one of the earliest residents, owned much of Anacostia for 150 years. When the federal city was laid out in 1791 by Andrew Ellicott and Benjamin Banneker, a free African American, speculation redoubled in Anacostia. James Barry of Washington City purchased St. Elizabeth. His name is perpetuated today in the Barry Farms community. An active land speculator, William Marbury of Georgetown, purchased Blue Plains and several Addison properties. Marbury was appointed inspector of the Blue Plains tobacco warehouse in 1809, but his name is enshrined in American history as the plaintiff in *Marbury v. Madison*, the case that established the constitutional principle of judicial review by the Supreme Court of Acts of Congress.

The land east of the river was included within the boundaries of the Federal City as a line of military defense and in order to claim the commercial and recreational potential of the river for the new city. In the 1790s, developers anticipated the establishment of a port at the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. This, they believed, would inevitably lead to major expansion of the city to the southeast. A sugar factory and wharf were built on Greenleaf Point on the west bank of the Anacostia.

Mrs. Alethia Browning Tanner. Born a slave, through hard work and diligence she purchased her freedom in 1810 and later purchased the freedom of 13 of her family members. Courtesy Howard University

A canal was planned through the city to this spot and to a point 1.5 miles upriver, where construction began on the Washington Navy Yard in 1799. The canal was begun but eventually abandoned. In 1804 a wooden drawbridge was constructed, through private enterprise, to replace a ferry that crossed the river at Pennsylvania Avenue. During the War of 1812, this bridge was burned by the Navy in a futile attempt to obstruct the advance of British troops after the Battle of Bladensburg (1814). The British simply crossed the Anacostia upstream at Benning's Road and burnt the Navy's ships in their docks before entering the city to burn the White House, the U.S. Capitol, and other public buildings.

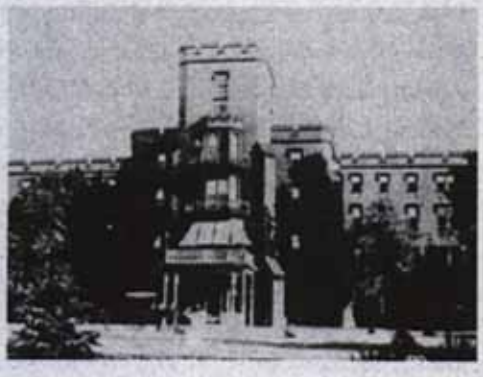
The Washington Navy Yard was the new nation's first navy yard and its first home port. It was also one of the city's largest employers. It became a center of early 19th-century naval operations during a critical period of growing nationalism. The illustration on the cover of this brochure is an 1833 view of Washington from the Anacostia highlands. Painted by George Cooke, it now hangs in the White House. The romantic beauty of the Anacostia farmland and the river itself are seen in the foreground, with the Navy Yard shown to the right on the opposite shore. The early sailing ships of the U.S. naval fleet were built in the distinctive triangular, tent-like structure reflected in the water. The U.S. Capitol, still under construction, is on the hill above and the

White House appears to the left. The Navy Yard bridge at 11th Street is barely visible at the far right.

In the years before the Civil War, increasingly smaller parcels of land were subdivided from the old Anacostia holdings. Some were bought by speculators, others purchased by truck farmers. The earliest of several settlements, the town of Good Hope, developed in the 1820s around a tavern on the southbound road on the heights above the bridge to the Navy Yard. In *The Anacostia Story*, historian Louise Hutchinson has documented the ways in which some Anacostia slave families were able to buy their freedom and become independent farmers, artisans, and craftsmen. Many of them settled in the Good Hope area. The Allen A. M. E. Church was founded here in 1850 by free African American families.

Dorothea Lynde Dix
Courtesy of St. Elizabeths Hospital

In 1852 Dorothea Dix, advocate for the humane treatment of the mentally ill, persuaded the U.S. Congress to provide an asylum for the insane of the District of Columbia. The site chosen was part of the original St. Elizabeth grant lying along the Anacostia ridge on the Piscataway Road (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue). This remains today one of the most beautiful areas of Washington, with extraordinary views over the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, the monumental city, and the surrounding countryside. The hospital was planned as a campus with grounds designed and lavishly planted in the romantic rural landscape manner used by Andrew Jackson Downing on the National Mall and by Frederick Law Olmsted at the U.S. Capitol. This bucolic setting was considered a healthy and beneficial environment for treatment of the mentally ill -- far different from the jails and workhouses in which they had previously been confined. It was, in fact, based on the same romantic ideal which led to the development of early Washington suburbs such as Le Droit Park and the planning of the Gallaudet College campus.



Center Building of St. Elizabeths, 1854;
Courtesy of St. Elizabeths Hospital

1342 U Street, SE
Courtesy DCSHPO

In 1854 developers John Fox, John W. Van Hook, and John Dobler purchased the 240-acre truck farm of Navy Yard blacksmith Enoch Tucker. Located at the fork of the Piscataway and Upper Marlborough Roads, the site was convenient to the Navy Yard bridge. They planned a community which they hoped would appeal to Navy Yard workers. Called Union Town, it was laid out in a seventeen-block grid pattern with approximately 700 lots 24' wide and 130' deep. Each lot was priced at $60.00 cash or $3.00 a month for 25 months. Advertising in the *Daily Evening Star*, the developers proclaimed that the community was "situated in the most beautiful and healthy neighborhood around Washington. The streets will be graded, the gutters paved, and edged with shade trees, without charge to lot holders." A central marketplace one block long and forty feet wide was provided as a focal point of the community. The main street separated along both sides of this open space, suggesting the boulevard appearance of more affluent suburbs. The lots sold quickly -- half in the first six weeks and the rest shortly thereafter. The easy terms were attractive to speculators, making it possible to assemble groups of lots cheaply. But because speculators held so many lots, and because fewer people were employed at the Navy Yard as the mission of the facility changed from shipbuilding to administrative headquarters, Uniontown, as it soon became known, remained largely a paper town until after the Civil War.

1312 U Street, SE
Courtesy DCSHPO

During the Civil War (1861-1865) a chain of fortifications was built along the Anacostia ridge to defend Washington, the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, and especially the Arsenal and Navy Yard, against a Confeder-

ate attack from such a strategic vantage point. The Anacostia River was at that time navigable for ships of war up to the Navy Yard. The great height of the ridge, the ravines, and the irregular slopes served to protect the fortifications against artillery attack from below, both by land and by water. Fort Stanton, located above what is now the Anacostia Historic District, occupied the closest position to the city. Enjoying panoramic views of the surrounding countryside, Fort Stanton was only 2.5 miles from the U.S. Capitol itself. When slavery was abolished in the District of Columbia on April 16, 1862, many newly emancipated slaves, both from Anacostia and the south, sought the protection of the Union Army in these Anacostia encampments. Some joined earlier free black settlements such as the one at Good Hope.

Navy Yard Bridge. View from Anacostia near Uniontown by Matthew Brady, 1862. Courtesy National Archives

After mortally wounding President Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865, actor John Wilkes Booth fled over the Navy Yard bridge, riding along the Good Hope Road and past Fort Stanton into southern Maryland.

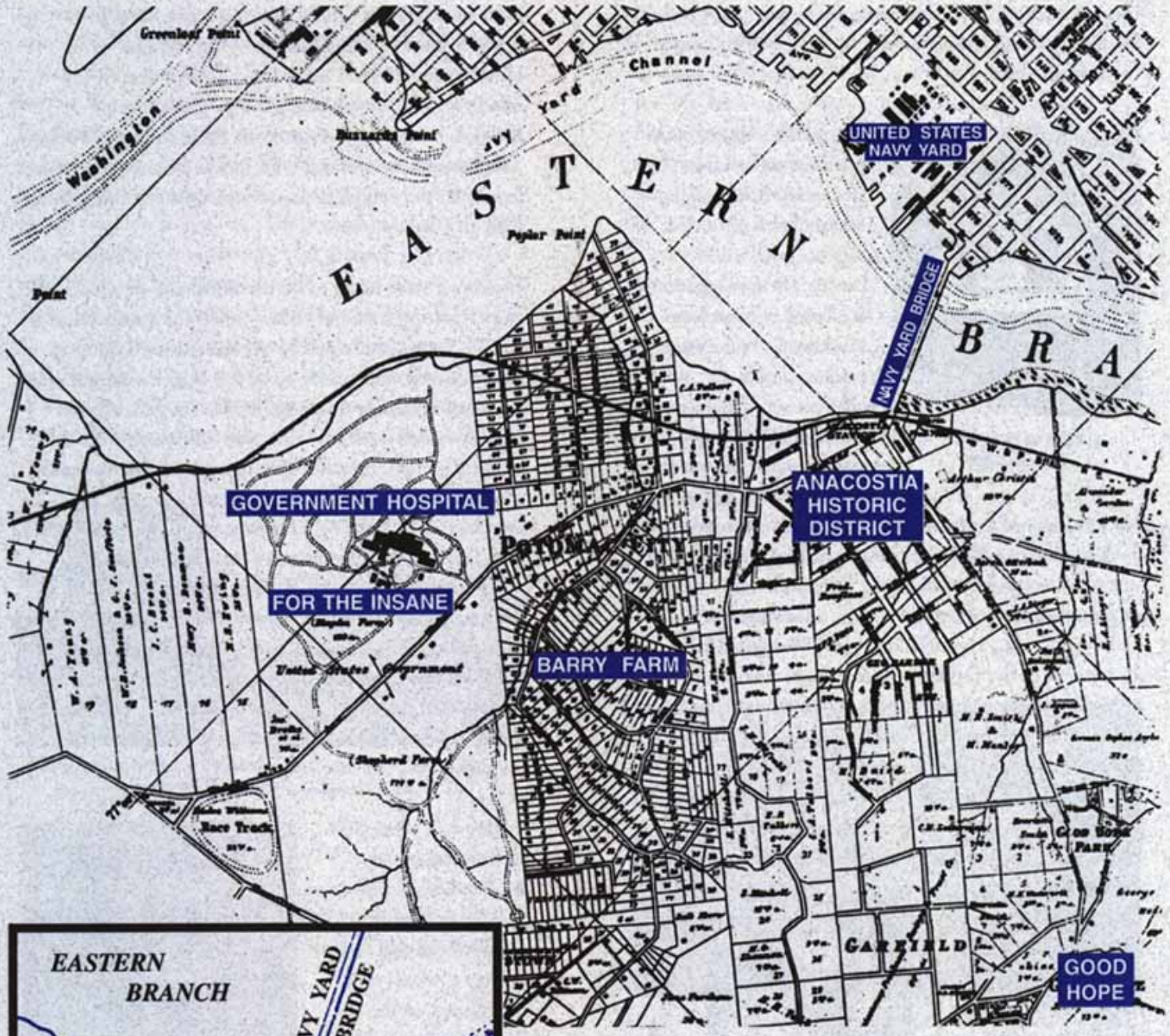
The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was created in 1865 to assist the 4 million freedmen as they began their new life. General O. O. Howard was placed in charge of the agency. A white abolitionist of strong religious convictions, Howard believed that education was essential to the success of the freedmen in their new lives as citizens. He made educational programs a priority of the Freedmen's Bureau, founding Howard University in 1866 and serving as its president from 1869 until 1874. Early efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau focused on public education. With the agency's assistance, a private school was established at Good Hope in 1865. The number of children applying to the school far exceeded its capabilities. In 1867, part of the Freedmen's educational fund was invested in a 375-acre tract of land purchased from the heirs of James D. Barry. This land was located on both sides of what is now Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, between St. Elizabeths Hospital and Uniontown. To the east, it was hilly and densely forested. On the west it reached over the cultivated flatlands bordering the Anacostia as far as Poplar Point. The community of Barry's Farm was planned to enable freedmen to become homeowners, thus providing them with an economic base.

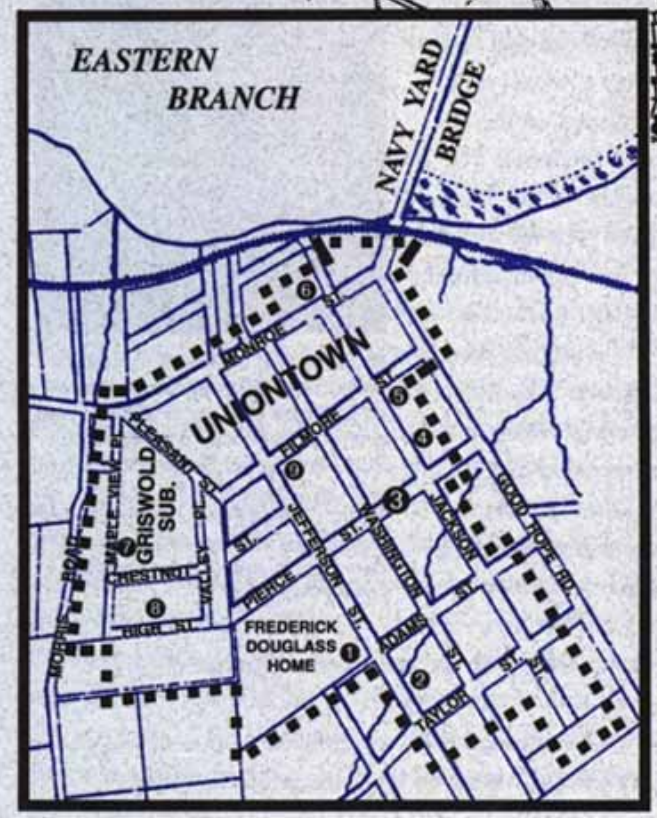
Freedmen were hired to do the initial site-development work, clearing land and cutting roads for a daily wage of $1.25. Part of this could be set aside toward purchase of a lot at a cost comparable to or less than the typical rent for housing in alley dwellings in the city. The cleared land was subdivided into one-acre lots which were sold to the freedmen together with enough lumber to build a small house. Carpenters were assigned to assist the freedmen with building. The cost was $125 to $300 for each family. Hutchinson notes that: "In order to purchase property, entire families worked in the city all day and walked at night to Barry's Farm to develop their land and construct their homes by lantern and candlelight. As one man described it, 'the hills and valleys were dotted with lights. The sound of hoe, pick, rake, shovel, saw and hammer rang through the late hours of the night.' "

Within two years, 500 African American families owned homes in Barry's Farm. At the outset of the project a school was established on the site where Frederick Douglass Junior High School is now located. The first public school, Hillsdale, opened in 1871. The first James G. Birney School opened in 1889. It was replaced first in 1901 and later by the present Birney School on Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue between Talbert Street and Howard Avenue.

Birthplace of Frederick Douglass Patterson (1901-88), third president of Tuskegee Institute. Patterson was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan for his work as organizer of the United Negro College Fund. This house on Elvans Road in Barry Farms, now demolished, was built by his father. Courtesy Dianne Dale

The 1870 census shows many skilled workers living in Barry's Farm whose occupations -- blacksmith,





The Anacostia Historic District, *(see map inset, showing approximate boundaries, at left)*, embraces a riverside workers' suburb of unpretenious, pleasant, vernacular residences distinguished by fanciful detail, porches, fences, and gardens which express the owners' personal choices. Including Cedar Hill, the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, the historic district is the focus of the larger historic Anacostia community. An informal walking tour begins and ends at the Frederick Douglass house. 1887 G.M. Hopkins *Map of the District of Columbia* courtesy National Archives.

1. Frederick Douglass National Historic Site
2. 1518 W Street, SE (formerly Jefferson St.)
3. Old Union Town marketplace
4. 1342 U Street, SE (formerly Jackson St.)
5. 1312 U Street, SE (formerly Jackson St.)
6. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue (formerly Monroe St.) Commercial District
7. 1340 Maple View Place, SE
8. 2331 High Street, SE
9. Italianate row, 13th and W Streets, SE (formerly Pierce and Jefferson Streets)

carpenter, shoemaker, bricklayer, house painter -- had been essential to the plantation economy which existed there before emancipation.

1518 W Street, SE
Courtesy DCSHPO

Meanwhile, Uniontown was slow to develop. As late as 1871, only 70 or 80 families had settled there. In the 1880 census, their occupations are listed as carpenter, blacksmith, boilermaker, printer, plumber, chainmaker, shipmaker, enlisted and commissioned Naval personnel, and laborer -- suggesting Navy Yard employment. Uniontown was supposed to be a white enclave. The initial subdivision of 1854 carried restrictive covenants prohibiting the sale, rental or lease of property to any Negro, Mulatto, or anyone of African or Irish descent. Nevertheless, by 1880 approximately 15 percent of the residents were African American, according to the census. Bordering Uniontown on the hilly land to the southwest was a large tract known as the Griswold Addition. It was subdivided in 1879 and is now bounded by High Street, Morris Road, Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Valley Place, SE. The Anacostia Historic District includes Uniontown, the Griswold subdivision and immediately adjacent areas, and recognizes the unique character of the unpretentious frame and brick dwellings constructed in this idyllic, semi-rural setting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

2331 High Street, SE
Courtesy DCSHPO

John Van Hook, one of the original developers of Uniontown, had built a house for himself on a high hill overlooking the subdivision in 1855. This house, with its mature trees, expansive lawns, and spectacular panoramic views of the nation's capital, was purchased by the eminent antislavery activist Frederick Douglass in 1877. He called the property Cedar Hill and lived there until his death in 1895. Douglass, born a slave, was one of the great American statesmen of his time. Although he never attended school, he recognized the importance of education early in his life, and was an indefatigable reader. He escaped to the north from his Maryland birthplace, becoming a brilliant speaker, writer, editor, and publisher tirelessly battling "for liberty, brotherhood, and citizenship." Douglass served as advisor to four U.S. presidents and was appointed Minister Resident and General Consul to the Republic of Haiti. He served with the District's Territorial Council, as U.S. Marshall for the District of Columbia under President Rutherford B. Hayes, and as the District's Recorder of Deeds. He was a business man as well. Connected with several banks, he was the first president of the Industrial Building and Savings Company. Douglass was widely known as the Sage of Anacostia. He was active in community affairs, and, from his aerie east of the river, protected the interests of the freedmen who were his neighbors. Cedar Hill is now a National Historic Site and is open to the public. It contains a large collection of memorabilia of the abolitionist movement and the career of Frederick Douglass.

Cedar Hill, home of abolitionist and statesman, Frederick Douglass. Built in 1855 by John Van Hook, one of the developers of Uniontown. Photographer, Larry Olsen: courtesy National Park Service

By 1880, government clerk and other white-collar occupations, teacher, midwife, dressmaker, grocer, sign painter, carriage maker, harness maker, and wheelwright had been added to the list of occupations represented among residents of Barry's Farm. Hutchinson characterizes it as:

"a community whose pleasant surroundings and available land afforded the opportunity of home ownership to blacks of varying socioeconomic levels. Former slaves and free blacks lived here, and together they developed a strong community with religious, educational, and cultural institutions, which attracted skilled artisans and craftsmen to homes that accommodated large and growing families."

Solomon G. Brown
Courtesy Smithsonian Institution

Under the territorial form of government adopted for the District of Columbia in 1871, Solomon G. Brown, one of the first African American settlers of Barry's Farm, was elected to the city's House of Delegates. Brown, a highly regarded clerk at the Smithsonian Institution, was elected by both white and African American residents of Anacostia. Frederick Douglass was appointed to the Legislative Council of the District by President Grant.

After the Civil War the city developed to the northwest rather than the southeast, further isolating the land east of the Anacostia River. Still, the access routes crossing the river were upgraded. The wooden Navy Yard bridge at 11th Street had been damaged by heavy use during the war and in 1874 Congress authorized its replacement with a new iron truss bridge. The Anacostia and Potomac River Street Railroad Company, based at the Navy Yard, became operational in 1875. Two one-horse cars travelled over the new bridge between the Navy Yard and Uniontown. An electric trolley was routed over this bridge in 1898, running up Martin Luther King Avenue past St. Elizabeths Hospital and opening the countryside beyond to residential development. Commercial corridors developed along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue and Good Hope Road. Although city services were slow to arrive, a strong, self-sufficient community developed. In the 1920s Anacostia was still semi-rural with an abundance of open spaces, woodland and gardens. Resident Charles R. Burr, in a speech to the Columbia Historical Society in 1919, listed many civic improvements:

Trolley Car in historic Anacostia
Campbell's hardware store in background (1884)
Courtesy Anacostia Neighborhood Museum

"We have now all the conveniences the rest of the city affords, but will continue our efforts to make improvements wherever needed through Anacostia. We are only 30 minutes from the center of the city by street cars and are the best equipped of any of the outlying parts of Washington City. All of the principal business places in the heart of the city deliver goods here, while there are here stores of all kinds which supply one with anything he may wish in merchandise and other household necessities."

1340 Maple View Place, SE
Courtesy DCSHPO

Anacostia Today

The Depression and World War II brought significant change to Anacostia. A large portion of the vigorous Barry's Farm community was demolished to make way for a low-rise public housing development. More homes were lost and the community was fragmented when the Suitland Parkway was routed through it. The construction of the Anacostia Freeway, the dual 11th Street bridges, the South Capitol Street bridge, and the intertwining approaches to all of these cut off the community from the river. This was typical of the experience of other American waterfront communities such as Georgetown and Boston as the interstate highway system developed. As urban renewal proceeded in other parts of the city, particularly the redeveloped Southwest neighborhood, large displaced populations were relocated in Anacostia in newly and often poorly constructed apartment buildings set down in what had been open fields. Much of this was public housing. The needs of the new residents far exceeded and overwhelmed the resources of the small community.

Today, after decades of neglect, Anacostia's citizens are working to revitalize their community. In 1978, the Anacostia Historic District was listed in the National

Register of Historic Places. In 1986, as plans were made to route the Metro Green Line through the old Barry's Farm neighborhood, a team of archaeologists conducted a major excavation project as part of the environmental impact survey required by federal law for the new construction. The historic preservation report included a detailed recording of the archaeological data recovered, the results of intensive historical research into Anacostia's past, and an architectural survey of the buildings that still existed in the proposed historic district. This material led to a better understanding of the life of the early residents of Barry's Farm. Unexpectedly, artifacts dating to 4000 B.C. were unearthed -- expanding our knowledge of the Native American culture that had thrived in Anacostia for thousands of years.

Italianate Row, 13th & W Streets, SE
Courtesy DCSHPO

The 1978 listing of the Anacostia Historic District was based largely upon architectural considerations. Barry's Farm was not included because few structures survived, and those that still stood were not representative of the free black community which had existed there. Sadly, this fragility of infrastructure is often the fate of early African American sites. Today, historic preservation reaches beyond architecture to incorporate the broader cultural approach exemplified by the Howard Road study. Archaeology, archival research, and oral history supplement architectural history in an attempt to achieve a comprehensive understanding of American life and events. The history of Anacostia presents a nationally significant microcosm of the full range and vitality of African American experience.

Four Generations of an African American Family in Anacostia

On February 23, 1973, John Henry Dale, Jr., and several members of his family shared their memories of almost a century of life in Anacostia in a videotaped oral history interview with historian Louise Hutchinson at the Anacostia Museum. Before the Civil War, Mr. Dale's great-grandparents had left North Carolina for Detroit, where his grandfather, Marcus Dale, was born, learned the cooper's trade, and married the daughter of the pastor of his local A. M. E. church.

In 1867 the Freedmen's Bureau sent Marcus Dale and his family to Cypremorte, Louisiana, to organize and teach in the first school for African Americans established in that community. He also founded an independent Methodist church. His son, John Henry Dale, Sr., was a teacher in Pass Christian, Mississippi, where John Henry Dale, Jr. was born. The lives of Marcus and John Henry Dale, Sr. were threatened many times in Louisiana and Mississippi by night riders who hoped to intimidate the freedmen by removing their preacher and teacher.

The Dale family came to Washington in 1886 when John Henry Dale, Sr., a gifted self-taught man, obtained a position as clerk in the newly constructed Pension Bureau building at 5th and G Streets, NW. First they lived near 13th Street and Florida Avenue, NW, then moved to Howard Road in Anacostia. Dale built a house at 2619 Nichols Avenue, now Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, drawing the plans and supervising the construction. The Dales and only one other family lived in this solidly built house for 100 years before it was sold to a church group and demolished. John Henry Dale, Jr. attended Birney School and the M Street High School. He remembers his father as a powerful influence in the community. "Back in those days it meant something if you were a good person. A word from him to a parent about a child who didn't do what they were supposed to do was sufficient to have that condition corrected."

He also remembers that the three African American policemen in the community were highly respected. "Everybody knew each other. I knew practically everybody from the river all the way to where Sears is now." Anacostia's isolation from the rest of the city meant "you had to be more dependent on one another for survival. Everyone in the Negro community had to pool their resources, help one another. If some family needed something to eat, we shared

Four Generations of the Dale Family: (left to right) Hattie, John Henry, Sr., Almore Marcus, Dianne, Marie, John Ivan, Lucille, Adrienne, and John Henry, Jr. Courtesy Dianne Dale.

what we had." The community acted as an extended family to raise all of its children. Orphaned children were nurtured in the homes of friends and neighbors. Anacostia preserved its semi-rural ambience well into the 20th century. Dales' brother Marcus, who lived at what is now 2607 Martin Luther King Avenue, delivered the mail with a horse and wagon and kept a cow, hogs and chickens.

Dale was a life-long member of the Campbell A.M.E. church. In 1924, when a new church was needed, the minister and congregation dug the foundations and built the new building themselves. Dale's brother-in-law, James Gillespie Patterson, a Philadelphia contractor, came to direct the work. The construction project was a true community effort. "Womenfolk came around and brought pig feet and chocolate and one stuff and another, strung up electric lights all around that lot and went there at night and dug out the foundation." Cooperative work was an integral part of life in this thriving community, and was taken as a responsibility by all civic organizations. Dale's son Almore followed his father's example. Almore Dale operated a grocery store on Elvans Road which had been purchased by his father with the greater community benefit in mind. Almore supported a broad range of civic activities and was an early member of the Anacostia Historical Society and a founder of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum.

John A. Moss
Courtesy Anacostia Neighborhood Museum

John Henry Dale, Jr.'s oral history interview included recollections of a number of Anacostians who had had a powerful influence in the community. Among these was John A. Moss, "...the only colored lawyer in and around Anacostia and one of the few, maybe, in the whole city of Washington." Born a slave in 1853, Moss was a protegé of Senator Charles Sumner. He graduated from Howard University Law School in 1873 and was immediately admitted to the District Bar. Hutchinson tells us that Moss was appointed justice of the peace by Presidents Hayes, Garfield and Cleveland. "Paid well by downtown clients, 'Lawyer' Moss often either took no fee or accepted payment in kind when he represented community residents in legal matters. It was not uncommon to see Moss walking home with a goose under each arm, after having successfully defended a member of the community."

Oral History and Family Memorabilia: Preserving the Past for Posterity

If you or someone in your family has a recollection of life in Anacostia in years past, remembers stories or has photos, letters, and other historic material, please get in touch with the Anacostia Museum at 202-357-1300. You can contribute to keeping the Anacostia story alive.

Frederick Douglass with his grandson Joseph Douglass, c. 1894. Courtesy Mrs. Ann Weaver Teabeau

THE ANACOSTIA HISTORIC DISTRICT
by
TANYA EDWARDS BEAUCHAMP

A Heritage Tourism Project of
THE GEORGETOWN HERITAGE TRUST
Betty Jane Johnson Gerber, President

Special Thanks to: DIANNE DALE, President
Anacostia Historical Society
CARL COLE
Greater Anacostia Coordinating Council

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Marion Barry, Jr., Mayor
Hampton Cross, D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer

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Frederick Douglass, the Sage of Anacostia
Photo courtesy of the National Archives

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